

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

On the Day of Atonement the High Priest first had to wash. He could not be robed in priestly vestments, he could not do the work of a Priest, he could not bring the required sacrifice, without a ceremonial washing. God ordained it. Only then, after washing, could he don the garb of the Priest, and make the prescribed sacrifice in the very presence of God. He had to be clean to make the offering, ceremonially clean, clean according to the Law of God.

And although that washing and vesting was commanded 1476 years earlier, it was, of course, fulfilled in Christ. It is He who was washed to fulfill all washing. He was washed in the Jordan by the hand of the one sent by God, the one who confounded the Priests.

He was washed in the very waters stopped when the Ark of the Covenant entered them, now those waters flowing freely upon the One who made that Ark holy, upon the One who established the Covenant. Once washed, then was He vested with His Office, the Great High Priestly Office, the Messianic Office, as the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and remained.

And although several times oil would be applied to His sinless Flesh, it was there, in the Jordan; there, as the Spirit marked Him as the Priest not after Aaron but in the order of Melchizedek; it was there at the bewildered hand of His cousin; that Mary's Son was Anointed, Installed as the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ, the long-promised Savior. Washed, vested, He could then go forth to do His High Priestly Work, and make the Once-For-All Sacrifice.

But the True Great High Priest was unlike any High Priest before Him. All the High Priests were required to wash. But the Great High Priest needed no washing. He was already clean. He was conceived and born without sin. He lived a sinless life. He was holy.

Since Abel brought of the firstborn of his flock and the Lord respected Abel and his offering, and every sacrifice made according to the Law thereafter, it was to the One baptized at John's hand that the sacrifices were made. Every sacrifice made by God's command taught of Him, pointed to Him, preached of Him, and to the Sacrifice He would make to reconcile you to God.

His baptism was not for Him. He needed no washing. His baptism was for you. For you were not born without sin. You were born with pervasive sin, sin that overwhelmed and defined and defiled you. That sin alone was sufficient to separate you from God. That sin alone was worthy of God's eternal condemnation. But, of course, as you must confess, that inherited sin was not alone.

For to that sin you daily added. Jealousy, wrath, sloth, lust, pride, selfishness, anger, slander, these are the fruit of the sin that controlled you, the sin by which you increased and multiplied the sin in which you were born. And no external washing, no Mosaic cleansing, no simple water, no physical removal of dirt from your body could cleanse you. The stain was too deep, the corruption too complete. Water was simply not enough to save you from eternal banishment to the tormentuous place from which Dives begged for water.

So it is in love, in mercy, in grace, it was to fulfill all righteousness, that Holiness Enfleshed, that God Incarnate was steeped in the waters of those stony banks, that by water His holiness be

brought to you. But that holiness would come to you not through stony banks, but through cross and stony tomb. The One who would bring the flood of watery salvation would first learn thirst.

For God chose the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty. Yes, He chose water, that comprehended with His Command and Promise it be a flood that opens heaven to you. But first He chose more profound weak things, things of the world, to put to shame the things which are mighty. He chose Flesh and Blood. God Himself took on Flesh. A spirit can't be baptized. Nor can a phantasm or a vision. Nor can an angel. To be baptized one must be concrete, physical. To be baptized one must have a body.

So for you the Eternal Word took on Flesh. To save you He became like unto you. To save you He blessed baptismal waters, that they be to you a salvific Flood of righteousness and holiness by which your sins are washed away. For it is in Christ the Baptized One that you are baptized with the Holy Spirit.

He is the New and Better Moses, the Prophet raised up from among His brethren, who leads you through a New and Better Sea, out of captivity and death and into freedom and life. He who made Himself like unto you declares you to be like unto Himself, as you are drawn out of the waters into the holiness He bestows upon you.

So to the Divine Mystery of His Holy Incarnation, the Great High Priest added the Divine Mystery of His Holy Baptism. It was a Mystery that provoked a Trinitarian Theophany – the Spirit made Himself visible, the Father made Himself audible, and the Son was manifest in the Holy and Pure Flesh that He took on. This New and Better Abel who is the Perfect First-Born Sacrifice would be respected by God. Although forsaken on the cross, with this Only-Begotten was the Father well pleased.

So there is hope, there is comfort, there is strength and joy for you, you who are baptized in the Triune Name. He washes you in the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, that His Name be scribed upon you, that you be saved body and soul. And the same God who uses lowly water for heavenly purpose, the God who chooses the foolish things, the weak things, the base things, chooses Bread and Wine, in which He gives you His Body and Blood.

The Body Baptized, the Body crucified and risen, the Body of Christ the Lamb of God He makes your Feast this day. You eat and drink, and you have the forgiveness, the righteousness, the salvation and the life your Lord won for you.

So it is that all righteousness is fulfilled when God the Son, who needs no baptism, is baptized by His cousin John. The Manifestation of the Triune God marks the Installation of the Christ into His Salvific Office. He is baptized not for Himself, but for you, that in your baptism you receive the benefits of His sinless conception, His holy birth, His perfect life, His precious death, and His glorious resurrection. Baptized into Christ, with you God is well pleased.

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